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The Eating Groups and Work Groups among the Tapirapé

000 [Os grupos de comer e os grupos de trabalho dos Tapirapé]

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[Title Page]

128 [Ed., p. 86 and all but the last two lines of p. 87 are not translated.]

[87] In the pages that follow I wish to discuss a social institution
121 of the Tapirapé, the like of which I have not yet found [88] either among the other tribes I have visited or in the literature. I call it "eating groups." [Ed., a paragraph is omitted.]

264 The social significance of this organization into "eating groups"
224 derives from their purpose, which is as follows. Sometimes it happens that the produce of the hunt or of the harvest, which among these Indians may be eaten by either sex and also by the children (for exam-
[262] ple, wild pig, curassow, guan, turtle, honey, etc.), is too sizable for the hunter's family and not sizable enough to be shared justly and advantageously with the entire population of the village. In such a case, to avoid a less equitable act, the distribution is made among the mem-
574 bers of the eating group to which the hunter belongs.
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264 At the time of my stay among the Tapirapé, they were divided
551 into seven eating groups [89]. They say that in the old days the groups were more numerous. The names of the existing groups are Txankanépéra [Tr., the Portuguese x equals English sh], Pananivũsna, Maniitivuéra, Kaũmanõ', Tãuaupéra, Ãmpirampé, Avãinki'. Whenever I asked for an explanation of their meaning, I was merely given the word tãtãupãua. Undoubtedly, however, some of the group names are related to the names of animals and plants, Txankanépéra with txankané (alligator), Maniitivuéra with mandiivũnã (a variety of manioc), Ãvãinki' with vuãiki'ã (a variety of manioc). This may be
[771] a vestige of totemic ideas, although they are not manifested in the behavior of the group members. For example, the attitude of the Txankanépéra group members toward the alligator is no different from that of the members of other groups. It is true that at the common
551 feasts each person is called by the name of the group and also is what
476 the name represents. Thus, for example, a member of the
264 Txankanépéra group will say, "Txe Txankanépéra," which means both "I am called Txankanépéra" and "I am Txankanépéra," and says to his group-fellow, male or female, "Ané Txankanépéra ('You are called Txankanépéra,' or 'You are Txankanépéra')."

192 Tãtãupãua designates both the common feast of a group and the
574 institution of eating groups in general. When I asked the Tapirapé what
476 they called themselves as a community, I got the answer "Ampiãua"
264 (a word that means "man" in the Tupí of the Amazon) and the statement
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[101] that all participants in the tãtĩupsũa [90] are called this. Nothing could point up the importance of the institution more effectively than this observation. [Ed., the remainder of the paragraph is omitted.]

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124 The word tãtĩ is used both by the Tapirapé and by the Karajá [Caraja] to designate cultivated bananas in general. It also means "fire" in their language, as in all Tupí-Guaraní tongues, and it differs
[194] from these only in its nasalization, an element which is peculiar to the Tapirapé language as a whole.

[192] The word upsũa means "everything eaten."

The word tãtĩupsũa may mean that the fire went out, or that everything that was near the fire was eaten.

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476 Every individual belongs to the same eating group through life. Sons belong to their father's group, daughters to their mother's.
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[611] The eating groups are not important to marriage; some of the men belong to the same group as their wives, while others belong to a different group.

[91] The principal chief, Kamairabó, was a Txankanépéra, while
123 the second chief, Vũatanamĩ, was a Pananĩvũĩna. As I lived in
[622] Kamairabó's household and belonged, in a way, to his family, I also became a Txankanépéra, and they explained to me that as a consequence my own relatives, although absent, had also become Txankanépéra.

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476 Within their group, all members regard one another as brothers
574 and sisters.
[609] Another aspect of the eating groups is important to social life, namely, at the common feasts people sit next to their group companions and are invariably associated with them, while they may never join them on other occasions. This institution thus creates a bond oc-
[621] casionally bringing together the inhabitants of different houses from birth to death.

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574 At certain times the entire population of the village gathers to-
621 gether for the tãtĩupsũa, which at such times is not really a feast carried out to meet the obligations imposed by the consumption-group organization, but a veritable banquet.

On July 3, the time of the kãuihó, or "bad kãuĩ" (literally, "big kãuĩ" [Tr., a soup]), was drawing to a close. In the afternoon the
[252] chiefs gave all the occupants of their house peanut kãuĩ, which formerly was masticated only by chiefs' wives and not by other women. It was warm and so good that I ate my fill.

[92] At sundown of the following day, large pots and plates of various foods were carried to the dancing plaza and placed in six sets. These sets tallied with the eating groups. The Kamanõí, owing to their small numbers, had joined the Ãvãinkãʼ to form a single group. All those who could do so brought something to eat for their group. [562] There were bananas, peanuts, peanut flour, boiled fish, fish sauce and manioc flour spiced with peppers, several varieties of karĩ [Tr., a kind of yam], peanut karĩ, etc. Before that, there was a great distribution of gifts. Each individual offered those people for whom he had special liking or esteem part of his precious possessions, such as beads and similar things. The chiefs received the greater part of this. One man had received three pairs of scissors and found no better use for them than to wear them as pendant ornaments.

Later, the eating groups sat around their pots. Beside them lay the ashes of burnt-out fires. The members of each group squatted together, men, women and children, and ate of everything as they [555] pleased. Kamairabó, the principal leader, got the best piece, a chunk of chicken, and with his usual courtesy shared it with me, his brother. We called each other "Tĩankanépéra," and Ampitãnya, his little [597] adoptive daughter who sat between us, shouted to me, "Anã Txankanépéra," and I called her by the same terms. The people in the other groups also called me "Txankanépéra," and I called them by the name of their group. We were all in very high spirits.

[93] All the participants in this feast sat so close together that there were no spaces whatever between the groups.

Within a quarter of an hour, everything had been eaten. The pots and plates were removed, and the people scattered. Night came. The plaza was taken over by the masked dancers. They represented "the [776] good shadows" [spirits]. All the "evil shadows" had taken kãuihó and vanished. The bad rainy weather, with its attendant hunger and illness, the "winter" of northern Brazil, was over. Now began the dry season with its "good shadows," summer.

They say that at the time of the harvest, around September, they also hold one of these common banquets for all the eating groups.

On July 15 I had the opportunity to watch the tãtãupãĩa of an eating group. On the previous day, a man of the Ãvãinkãʼ had killed with a club a wild pig brought to bay by the dogs. The task of roasting the meat at home fell to the women belonging to this eating group. [462] In payment for this work they were allowed to keep at home certain parts,

much as the head and legs, which they gave to those members of their family who did not belong to the same eating group.

The feasting had already begun before the sun was up. In the takána, the large dance house, which is essentially a men's house and thus as a rule not visited by women, the Ãvãinkí˝ of both sexes sat [96] on straw mats stretched for the purpose around large pots containing the roasted pig. The animal was cut up in such a way that the pieces could easily be held in the hand.

When I appeared, they all graciously invited me to help myself. I declined, stating that I was a Txankanfpéra, and in view of this they did not insist further.

Naturally, members of other eating groups may ask the feast participants for a piece. Custom, however, demands that they withdraw after receiving what they requested. Only members of the same group may sit in the circle surrounding the pots. As a rule, however, a member of another group does not come to the people who are feasting and ask for a piece.

In any case, I did not want to carry my pride in being a Txankanéfpéra too far, and therefore I accepted the invitation of a special friend, Vuãnomantxí, whose wife had prepared the bulk of the food for the Ãvãinkí˝ and thus earned the pig's head for her family. While she sat with her group-fellows in the takána, her husband and son, and a few other persons who were not relatives but who belonged to the family, so to speak, because they were the only other occupants of the small hut, lay across their hammocks and chewed contentedly. When I came in, Vuãnomantxí tore from the pig's head the piece that he considered the best and offered it to me. I began to chew on it, and this required much fortitude because the meat was very tough. [95] When my chin began to hurt badly and I was certain that I had swallowed enough of those awful bites, I craved a bonus and asked for the brains. My friend smiled--he always had a friendly smile for me, thoroughly joyous and relaxed--and gave me to understand that my tastes were not inferior to those of the most illustrious Tapirapé. Then, with his athletic strength, he broke open the skull, handed me the bulk of the brains, and stuffed the rest into his mouth.

Before the sun was up, only the pig's bones remained in Vuãnomantxí house and in the takána.

Aside from the tatáupáua, there is another institution which also involves eating in hereditary groups. It is called apatxirú. Its purpose,

264 476 however, is totally different from that of the tãtĩupsĩua. It is not a group organization for consumption, but for production. For this reason, also, the feasts in specific groups associated with this institution are merely accessory.

The social significance of apatxirũ resides in the possibility of sharing a collective task in such a way that no member of the tribe will [461] feel discredited by an unfair assignment. This is done by turning work into a festive occasion and a sports competition.

"When there is a lot of water everywhere in the rainy season, the [776] [291] ãuvanaʃ 'shadows' live in the takĩna. Their headdress and breechcloth are of muriti leaves, but their headdress does not have any macaw [535] feathers. [96] They dance through the entire rainy season. At that time, there are no other 'shadows' (antxĩna) but them. Unlike other 'shadows,' these do not live in the hills or in the waters, but only in the takĩna. They do not sing, but only grunt in a low voice. During [261] the moons of the great rains, the belly does not get as full as during the dry season. But the ãuvanaʃ have to eat. Then they go to the gardens and 'steal.' They take what they stole to the takĩna, where they eat it. In the apatxirũ, we prepare the gardens where they seek their food. They 'steal' only from those gardens that are prepared for them alone. The ãuvanaʃ are not evil. All Tapirapé men are ãuvanaʃ.

Such is, in summary, the information I received when I asked the purpose of the common gardens prepared in the apatxirũ.

For the apatxirũ, all Tapirapé men are divided into three work-groups called vuĩra. The word vuĩra means "bird," and the name of [551] each group designates a mythical bird which is represented not only by the group as a whole but by each of its individual members. They are called Tãnãvé, Anantxĩ, and Vuirantxinió.

The Tãnãvé group was the smallest one at the time of my visit, [624] but it included the individuals of highest social status: the principal chief, Kamairabó; the second chief, Vũatanamĩ́; the chief and most [123] eminent sorcerer--medicine man, Urukumĩ́; and myself. (Naturally, Kamairabó stated immediately that I would be a Tãnãvé like himself.)

[97] Each of the three work groups has two leaders called ãmaĩva. 264 622 476 651 The ãmaĩva of the Tãnãvé were Vũatanamĩ́ and Urukumĩ́. (Although Kamairabó was also a Tãnãvé, he seemed to be the head of all three groups in his capacity as principal chief. He is also the only one whose private plot is prepared by the village inhabitants as a collective endeavor, while the private plots of other tribal members are prepared

264 476 [622] [651] only by their respective owners. I do not know, however, whether the three groups we are discussing here are involved in the preparation of the principal chief's garden.)

The ãntaiva of the Anantxí were the chief Tanupantxóa and [624] Vuíraí, and those of the Vuiramtxinió were the chief Kamairí and the sorcerer--medicine man Maninohó.

476 857 In the old days, the boys of the tribe were divided into three groups corresponding to the three work-groups of the men. They were called Vuanankóra, Vuirantxína, and Vuírantxinoí. The last one is now extinct. The boys whose fathers are Tãnãvé or Anantxí belong [611] to the first one, and the sons of the Vuirantxinió to the second one. The third group also consisted in the past of boys whose fathers were Vuirantxinió. They say that the adolescent enters his father's work- [881] group at his initiation and becomes a member of it for life.

The boys' groups accompany the three work-groups of the men in [462] all their endeavors. The female sex does not belong to this institution, for "the women and girls stay home when the men do collective work."

[98] They say that each apatxirí group has its specific ornament 301 476 535 237 for certain dances, but these are usually held at a time of year when I was not with the Tapirapé. The Tãnãvé wear three large red macaw feathers hanging from the head onto the back. The Anantxí also wear three large macaw feathers in the same fashion, but two are from the blue and yellow macaw and only the middle one is red; in addition, they wear on their arms the white breast fluff of the king vulture. The Vuirantxinió are not differentiated from the Tãnãvé. The Vuanankóra wear smaller red feathers from the tail of the macaw, hanging from the head onto the back. The Vuirantxína are similarly adorned and also wear macaw fluff on their arms.

192 Concerning the word apatxirí, Curt Nimuendajú wrote me as follows in a letter dated February 20, 1936: "The Tapirapé word apatxirí is the usual Tupí term for a gathering of people for a common task (ordinarily, for one of the individuals involved)." [Ed., the remainder of the quotation, p. 98 and first paragraph on p. 99, is omitted.]

47 [123] [99] On July 30, Kamairahó invited me to go with him to the apatxirí. On the previous day, Chief Tanupantxóa had already begun the common felling of trees with several men.

In the afternoon we walked for about an hour through the forest toward the east, until we reached the spot where people were working

under the leadership of the ãntaiva of the Anantxí, Tanupantxóa and Vuíraí. Here the Anantxí were present in larger numbers than the other groups, for they were, so to speak, the contractors of this particular apatxirú. No division into three groups was evident, however, as the work progressed. All the Tãnãvé, Anantxí, and Vuirantxinió mixed together at random.

Tanupantxóa marked out the forest sections to be cleared by going to those spots without saying a word and attacking a tree with his ax. [554] He showed that he was the leader by working more than the others.

Ãntaíva of other groups were also present and working, such as Urukumí of the Tãnãvé and Kamairá of the Vuirantxinió. Vuãtanamí [578] had gone to his garden. As usual, he probably wanted to avoid meeting Kamairahó, whom he hated. Maninohó had stayed home. Kamairahó sat on a felled tree and watched.

[100] Each man, as soon as he felt the desire to work, chose a tree for himself, as he pleased, in the vicinity of the ãntaíva, and the contest began. It did not seem to be a contest against the fellow workers, a fight to win over the others by achieving more, but a joyous contest against the timber and the big forest, against the forest as a whole, for it was not merely a matter of conquering each tree individually with the brute strength of the arms, but also a matter of strategy. First an incision in a good number of trees was made in such a way that they would all fall in the same direction when their tottering neighbor leaned against them from the opposite direction. Only then was a forest giant felled, and felled in such a way that it dragged with it to the ground its fellows weakened by the ax.

After extreme exertion for a while, each man would rest until he felt like resuming his task. They were all quite diligent.

The Indian works according to a different rhythm than that followed by the men of our civilization. He does not carry out the same task every day, at a certain time and for a certain period of time, but gives himself up with all his senses and all his strength to whatever task seems to him most necessary at the moment and best suited to his creative urge. When he does this, he does not spare himself but persists in his heavy work until he is completely exhausted. For example, he gives himself to the felling of trees with such fanaticism that on the following day he can hardly get out of his hammock owing to the muscular pain. [101] As soon as he feels a little better, he carves a bow stave or weaves a basket. Suddenly, he feels a craving for

bananas. If he has no bananas left at home, the man goes to the garden to get a new supply. He returns staggering under an enormous load, for he brings as much as he can carry. And although by this time he is already tired enough to lie down in the hammock again, he may fulfill his duties as a dancer and singer throughout the night, duties that demand of a single man the rested legs and lungs of five strong males. [Ed., the remainder of p. 101, pp. 102-194, and the first paragraph on p. 105 are omitted.]

[105] On the other hand, it is true that there are great differences among the various tribes as far as industriousness is concerned. The Tapirapé may be pointed out as being especially "diligent." At the time of my stay among them, they had an abundance of food, and in spite of this they worked very hard in their gardens and gave themselves up with no less zeal and perseverance to their dances and songs. In this tribe, which is still distant from our civilization, the introduction of iron tools that began dozens of years ago through their eastern neighbors, the Karajá, and the lack of war-like activities or bem had an effect directly opposite to that generated [by the same factors] in the Indians civilized by us, that is to say, deprived of their cultural independence. These two factors did not hinder the vital force or impair the creative urge of the Indians, but in fact guaranteed their subsistence and increased their well-being. If, in spite of this, symptoms of degeneration are apparent among the Tapirapé, [106] the causes must be sought elsewhere. This, however, is not the proper context to discuss them. [Ed., all but the last sentence of the subsequent paragraph is omitted.]

When watching a collective task among the Indians, such as the apatxirú of the Tapirapé, one has the impression that the joy with which it is done increases their strength.

As I watched the men, most of them endowed with the physique of our adolescents, conquering piece after piece of the huge forest around them, I observed none of the sometimes gloomy seriousness and tediousness which characterize so much of the collective work among us. Joyous shouts echoed and peals of laughter rang out on every side.

Those who needed rest sat on the felled trunks. They sat very close together as they have the habit of doing. They talked, and some of them smoked a pipe. Suddenly there would be a lot of shouting, they would all scatter with a show of joy as the moan of live timber was heard, [107] and a green giant would lean slowly and crash with a

476 thundering noise, dragging along in its fall its weaker companions.

Every once in a while, a voice was heard behind the trees. One [222] could not see who it was, but the call sounded very close. Immediately, the boys rushed to the spot where the voice came from. Soon they returned with their arms full of bananas. They ran jubilantly toward us and distributed them.

These bananas reached a length of 30 centimeters and a middle [137] circumference of 15 to 20 centimeters. The men brought them in [482] hampers close to the working area, but never came out of the woods into the garden with their load.

The skin of the bananas was black, and their flesh was already 252 brownish and too soft. This is the condition in which the Tapirapé 262 like them best. The fruits are gathered when green and buried at the [222] spot where they grew. The Karajá do the same thing. In the sun- [171] heated ground, the bananas reach the desired state of rottenness more quickly than if they were kept at home. Then, too, they are warm when taken out of the ground, and this endears them further to the Indians.

They are not peeled in order to be eaten. The tough skin is 264 opened a little at one of the tips, the tip is placed between the lips, and the skin slowly emptied by squeezing it with the fingers so that the pulp gradually enters the mouth. Kamairahó ate one banana after another. As for myself, I found them nauseating.

264 [108] The sun was already quite low when we left. We forged 476 ahead at a rapid pace, one behind the other on the narrow trail. We 462 were not far from the village when the path opened onto a small, 574 cleared, triangular space. The women sat in the corners of this space and watched us in silence. The women and girls had split into three groups which tallied with the work groups of their husbands and fathers. They had placed pots of food in the area in the same arrangement. [262] There were banana kãṹ, peanut kãṹ, cottonseed kãṹ, toasted karã́, and many other good things. Each group ate only from the pots placed for it at a specific spot. There were smaller quantities for the Tãnãvé, because they were fewer. I was invited from all sides, and since I [123] was very hungry I did not spare the other two groups. Only when I was beginning to be satiated did I put down, with a great show of surprise, the pot of banana soup of the Anantxí from which I had just partaken, and declared that I was a Tãnãvé. This fact, however, did not seem to be of great importance to my hosts.

264 462 476 [123] The pots were soon emptied. Then the women and girls came, picked them up, and took them home. The men followed. The Anantxí walked first, with the Vuirantxinió behind them and the Tãnãvé last. They kept this order, and sent me back to the rear when I stepped--not unintentionally--in the midst of the Vuirantxinió.

535 [109] As soon as the village was in sight, things began to move. The men ran straight to the takána and paired up for the dance. The women and girls showed no interest in this and for the most part had already gone to their huts.

The dancing pairs stood in a dense cluster in front of the entrance. In each pair, as was customary, one of the men held his arm across the other's shoulders, while his companion held his arm across the other's hips. Both held a club, bush knife, or bow in the other hand. In the midst of the group stood the leading pair, Tanupantxóa and Vuiraí, the ãntaĩva of the Anantxá. The Anantxá had now mixed with the Vuirantxinió. Of the Tãnãvé, only Kamairahó, Urukumĩ', and I had come. We stayed nearby as onlookers.

First, the men danced for a while on the same spot. As usual, they pawed the ground, all at the same time and always with the same foot, alternating from right to left, keeping their knees slightly bent and the middle part of the body slightly bent forward. Then the leading pair gradually moved away from the spot. They danced with small steps out of the takána. The others followed in the same fashion. They all moved, one pair after the other, slowly, toward the house of Vũãtanamĩ', singing with sounds and shouts rather than words.

When they reached the house of the second leader, the procession broke up. They did not scatter, however, but remained close together. [110] The race began. It is called ãhẽũĩ, which means "I run." The adolescents, who were in their initiation year and hence had their faces and bodies completely blackened with genipap, ran two at a time in a straight line across the dance plaza to the back of Kamairahó's house. Actually, there was no spot to be reached first by the winner, and there was no applause from the spectators. It might almost be said that there was no winner. As a rule, indeed, the desire to be singled out or to single out someone is not manifested by these Indians and is probably even regarded by them as a danger to the harmony of the community. These races seemed to be merely runs to be made as fast as possible across the plaza to convince the boys themselves of their own ability. As soon as the two runners reached

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Ta 526 883 Kamairahó's house, they renewed their mutual holds and smiled graciously at each other (1).

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1. In a letter of February 20, 1936, Curt Nimuendajú wrote to me about the Timbira, a Gê tribe: "The Timbira also have a paired race across the village plaza (which is 300 meters in diameter). It is usually held following a more important ceremony. It is called ka-kaĩpña (ka, 'village plaza,' and kaipña, 'across')."

Ta 526 Later, some of the men also took part in the test, even the "old hunter" Kantxovanĩ. When darkness fell, they all went home. Only a dozen pairs had run altogether, for they had started out when the sun had already sunk behind the forest.

Ta 476 [535] [526] [111] On the following afternoon there was another apatxirũ at a different spot. The participants were so few that there was no dancing or racing. Two days later, a bigger apatxirũ was held with all the features, this time to the northwest of the village. Thus, apatxirũ are held on different days and at different places. Not all the men take part. Some work for themselves in their gardens, and others stay home. [Ed., Plates 1-26 are omitted since they concern tribes other than the Tapirapé.]

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Plate 27.

Tapirapé Dance of Men and Women.

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Plate 28.

Tapirapé Masked Dance.

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Plate 29.

Tapirapé Boys.

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Plate 30.

Tapirapé: the Race at Nightfall following the apatxird.

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Plate 31.

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Tapirapé Woman
Pounding Urucú.

Plate 32.

Tapirapé Masked Dancer.